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Celebration on African-American Justices Attracts Community

San Francisco – Prominent jurists, invited guests, and members of the public gathered in the Great Hall of the Hiram Johnson State Building on Thursday, July 7, 2011, to unveil a resolution recognizing the 50th anniversary of African-American appellate court justices and the 70th anniversary of African-American trial court judges.

<http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/20110624item10.pdf>

The resolution, unanimously approved by the Judicial Council on June 24, was unveiled by Mrs. Eleanor Manuel, wife of the 92nd and first African-American justice of the California Supreme Court, the late Justice Wiley W. Manuel.

Joining Mrs. Manuel to reveal the golden-framed document was William C. Vickrey, Administrative Director of the Courts, and Ronald Overholt, Chief Deputy Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts. It commends the significant achievements of the 17 African-American justices who have served on the California Supreme Court and Courts of Appeal. Of the 17, five African-American men and one African-American woman currently sit on the state Courts of Appeal.

Judge Winifred Younge Smith, of the Superior Court of Alameda County, served as mistress of ceremonies for the half-hour ceremony which included remarks from Mr. Michael Thompson, son of the late Court of Appeal Associate Justice Leon Thompson, who served in the Second Appellate District from 1982 to 1988; Ms. Fran Jones, director of the California Judicial Center Library; and First Appellate District Associate Justice Timothy A. Reardon, member of the California Appellate Court Legacy Project Committee.

The photographic exhibit of the justices, titled “And Justice For All,” will be on display in the Great Hall of the Hiram Johnson State Office Building, 455 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, through July 14. The exhibit is a collaborative project of the California Legislative Black Caucus and the Administrative Office of the Courts.

A second exhibit, “African-Americans in the California Courts,” created by the California Judicial Center Library, features early California cases involving African Americans. It is currently on display in glass cases in the Archives Room—immediately adjacent to the Great Hall—of the court’s offices in the Earl Warren Building, 350 McAllister Street, San Francisco.

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The Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts carries out the official actions of the council and ensures leadership and excellence in court administration.